GEORGETOWN, MA

Housing Production Plan

2025-2030

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

Plan • Innovate • Promote

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background & Purpose

A Housing Production Plan, or HPP, is a state-guided plan that articulates a city or town's path, goals, and vision towards creating affordable housing in the community. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts allows communities to use certified HPPs as a way for achieving compliance with M.G.L. Chapter 40B if the community has not yet reached the statutory threshold of having 10% of its housing stock designated as affordable.

The Town of Georgetown last created its HPP in 2017. That 5-year plan was due to expire in 2022, and thus this plan began its creation. Following state guidance, this plan offers tools and strategies for how to achieve affordable housing production goals. More than that, however, this plan articulates a strategy for increasing housing of all types in the community. As is shown throughout the plan, Georgetown has a need and a desire to diversify its housing stock and create a community where all its residents have access to the housing that best fits their needs.

MVPC previously spearhead a region-wide Housing Production Plan (HPP) process, co-creating a series of 14 HPPs alongside municipal partners in 2018, in addition to creating the Merrimack Valley Regional Housing Production Plan. As these plans have been in place, the region has implemented strategies aligned with increased housing production including the adoption of inclusionary zoning, increased permitting activity for multi-family development, and proactively pursuing funding opportunities geared towards supporting creation of housing types to meet the needs of residents. Those 14 plans, along with Georgetown's HPP, helped guide the region's housing production. As their expiration dates neared, MVPC launched this HPP update project.

The HPP process allowed for MVPC, community Stakeholder Committees, municipal planning staff, and members of the public to come together and learn from one another about the unique challenges, aspirations, and concerns related to housing in each of the region's communities. As the statewide housing shortage affects each and every community in the Commonwealth, it is more crucial than ever to understand the individual nuances of community housing development and address the shortage from a place of mutual understanding and commitment.

As part of this process, The Town of Georgetown, in collaboration with MVPC, conducted two public engagement events to closely involve Georgetown residents in the HPP update process. The first event was a virtual session on October 12, 2023, where participants had the opportunity to review region-wide and local housing data and discuss their interpretations of how this data resonated with their lived experiences. The second event was held in-person on July 17 2024, where participants provided feedback and insight within a series of discussions representing key housing production strategies that are included in this HPP.

Acknowledgments

On behalf of the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, we would like to express our sincere thanks to all who participated in the 2024-2029 Georgetown Housing Production Plan process.

Throughout this update process, a Stakeholder Committee comprised of Town personnel and Affordable Housing Trust members with a vested interest in housing accessibility routinely gathered to build consensus around Georgetown's existing housing landscape and what types of strategies and action items would work most effectively to continue to build a Georgetown that includes a variety of housing types with varying affordability. This intensive, thoughtful work would not have been possible without the significant contributions of time and thought from each and every member of the Committee. In addition to this core work, Georgetown co-hosted a series of community engagement sessions, one virtual and one in-person, to glean public sentiment around key housing production strategies and simultaneously educate on these types of tools. Thank you to the Georgetown community at-large and the Stakeholder Committee for their impactful contributions to this important plan.

Georgetown Housing Production Plan (HPP) Stakeholder Committee:

- Dianna Twomey, Affordable Housing Coordinator
- C. David Surface, Affordable Housing Trust Chair
- Charles Keilty, Affordable Housing Trust Member
- Robert Hoover, Affordable Housing Trust Member
- Timothy Ruh, Affordable Housing Trust Member

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission:

- Ian Burns, Community & Economic Development Program Manager
- Kayla Rennie, Community & Economic Development Planner
- Lauren Keisling, Community Planner
- Tyler Distefano, Community Planner
- MVPC's Executive Director, Deputy Director, and Program Managers all contributed their expertise to the production of this final plan.

The Consensus Building Institute (CBI) provided robust planning, coordination, and facilitation support for the community engagement phase of the regional HPP update process.

The development of this plan is funded through the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) Community Planning Grant, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) Planning Assistance Grant, and through District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) funds.

Community Overview & Findings

Georgetown is a small, residential community bordered by Groveland and Newbury to the north, Rowley to the east, and Boxford to the south and west. Georgetown retains all of the characteristics of a suburban town with large tracts of land as protected open space or not suitable for development because of wetlands or lack of infrastructure. The town was incorporated in 1838, late in the state's history, after spending the 17th and 18th centuries attached to Rowley.

Georgetown changed gradually between the 19th and 20th centuries from a small manufacturing community to one which is almost wholly residential, serving now as a suburb of nearby cities. Town residents have easy access to Interstate 95 and Routes 97 and 133, with many of them commuting to their jobs in Boston and along I-95.

Georgetown has experienced both population and household growth over the last several years. From 2010 to 2020, the Town gained about 300 residents.

Homes for sale in Georgetown tend to be higher priced than in nearby communities. The average price for all home sales (single family & condominiums) was about $751,000 in 2023. Roughly 80 percent of Georgetown's occupied housing units were owner occupied and 20 percent renter occupied, which is typical for the smaller suburban towns in the region.

Georgetown has a low homeownership vacancy rate, reasonably high rental prices, and a potential decrease of population and households in the coming years. This indicates that Georgetown's housing needs may be best addressed through a combination of new housing production of affordable ownership and rental units, both in the form of single family and multi-family homes. Similar to other small towns in the region, Georgetown is experiencing a demographic shift:

- Georgetown's population is projected to decrease by 14% between 2020 and 2040[1]
- Between 2020 and 2050, the following changes to Georgetown's age distribution are projected to occur:[2]
  - 10% decrease in population under 20
  - 12% increase 65+ population

The demographic shift would indicate a need for housing types to accommodate an aging population with more accessible units that accommodate a variety of needs, including both physical and mental disabilities. This shift will also need to accommodate various income levels, as an aging population may indicate a higher proportion of residents on a fixed income.

1 Source: UMASS Donahue Institute, Massachusetts Population Projections

2 Source: UMASS Donahue Institute, Massachusetts Population Projections, "Age/Sex Details"

2018-2025 Housing Accomplishments

Over the past 5 years, the Town of Georgetown has worked diligently to advance its housing production efforts, in accordance with its 2017 Housing Production Plan. Through joint efforts spearhead by the Affordable Housing Trust, Planning Department, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, and Select Board, the following accomplishments have been achieved:

Planning & Policies:

- Successfully requested and received $595k in 2022 and 2024 from Town residents at Annual Town Meetings in order to acquire sufficient funds to acquire properties for affordable housing.
- Implemented the Trust's acquisition strategy and implemented policy allowing for timely purchasing of units being sold in the open housing market.
- Sold and acquired several properties for affordable housing, along with running the lotteries for these properties.
- Continued Rental Assistance Program (RAP) helping Georgetown families with short term rental assistance.
- Implemented an Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) during 2020-2022 to help address the rental crisis created by Covid-19.
- Improved awareness and communications with other Town Boards and Commissions on affordable housing initiatives.
- Created a new Trustee training curriculum.
- Updated the municipal bylaw for Accessory Dwelling Units.
- Created a 3A Multi-Family Overlay District with three sub-districts across the community.

Since 2008, Georgetown has successfully enforced its Inclusionary Housing Balance Bylaw Section 165-71 (https://ecode360.com/6485404#6485404). The primary purpose of Section 165-71 is to increase the supply of rental and ownership housing for low- and moderate-income households in Georgetown, contribute affordable housing units to the Town's Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), sustain a viable community making multiple housing options available for future generations in Georgetown and ensure that all units established under this bylaw count towards the satisfaction of the Town's affordable housing requirements under the Comprehensive Permit Law, MGL c. 40B, sections 20-23. Currently, any proposed development containing residential units that would create three (3) or more attached or detached new housing units shall provide affordable housing units or housing contribution payments.

If Georgetown were to fall below the 10% minima for any reason, the Town will do its best to achieve its 0.5% housing production goal. Georgetown is willing to work preemptively with a quality developer utilizing a Local Initiative Program to encourage the creation of additional affordable housing to keep its SHI greater than ten percent, especially within the Downtown MBTA 3A overlay district. This could include density bonuses with Open Space Residential Development and Independent Senior Housing as well as waiving fees if there were an excellent proposal from a reputable developer.

Strategies that Georgetown uses to address the requirement for participation in regional collaborations addressing housing development include our partnership with the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission. The MVPC helps Georgetown with additional insight and assistance establishing regional collaborations such as the housing development on Parish Road with the Town of Newbury. In addition, Georgetown looks to conduct joint planning with the towns of Newbury and Rowley because of stress on the Parker River aquifer that the three towns share.

Chapter 2: Demographic Profile

Population

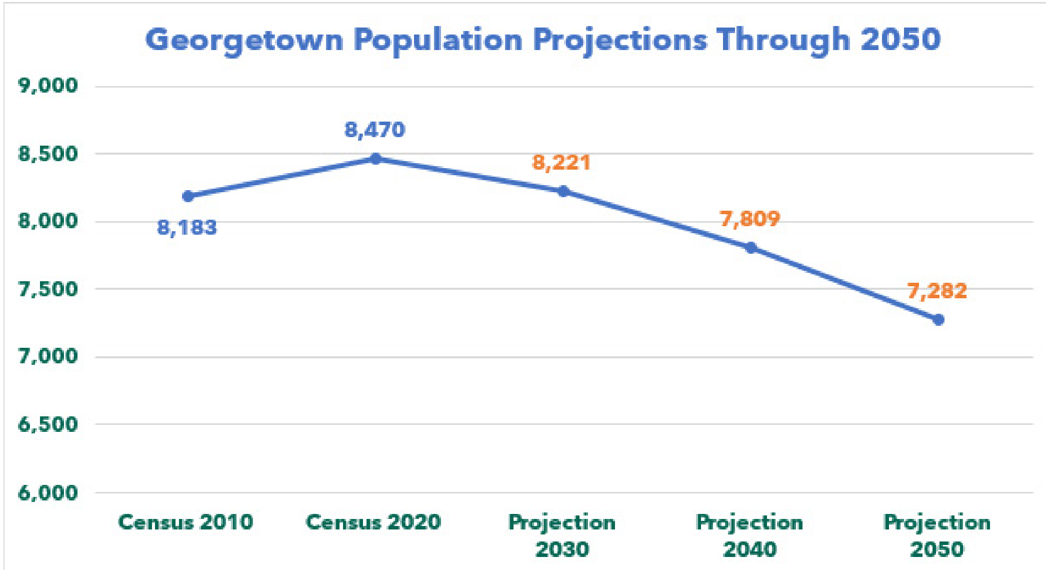


FIGURE 1: POPULATION PROJECTIONS THROUGH 2050 [1]

Per the 2020 Census, the Town of Georgetown has a population of 8,470 residents. Population projections from the UMass Donahue Institute indicate that between 2020 and 2050, the population is projected to decrease by about 14% percent, from 8,470 to 7,282. This projected decrease over 30 years is moderate, and is estimated based on current birth, mortality, and local migration trends. This projection is most likely to hold true if the town does not attract additional young families in the coming years, and can be mitigated if the Town encourages growth.[1] Georgetown is not alone with these projections, as similarly sized communities in the region are also anticipating a population decline. With that in mind, Georgetown has begun taking steps toward providing opportunities for sustainable growth, which may help combat the projected decrease in population. Promoting and maintaining diverse housing availability is a substantial factor in mitigating out-migration, as well as providing opportunities for new residents looking to move into Town. The strategies Georgetown looks to employ in this plan may be leveraged to encourage sustainable growth for the community.

These projections, combined with changing household compositions (fewer children, more people over 65, and more single-person households), point to the possible need to rethink how the current housing stock is used. This could include seeking opportunities to redevelop existing properties to accommodate changing needs, or to encourage development of housing types that best fit the demographics.

1These projections are compiled by the UMass Donahue Institute with support from the Massachusetts Secretary of State. The full methodology for these projections can be found [here](#).

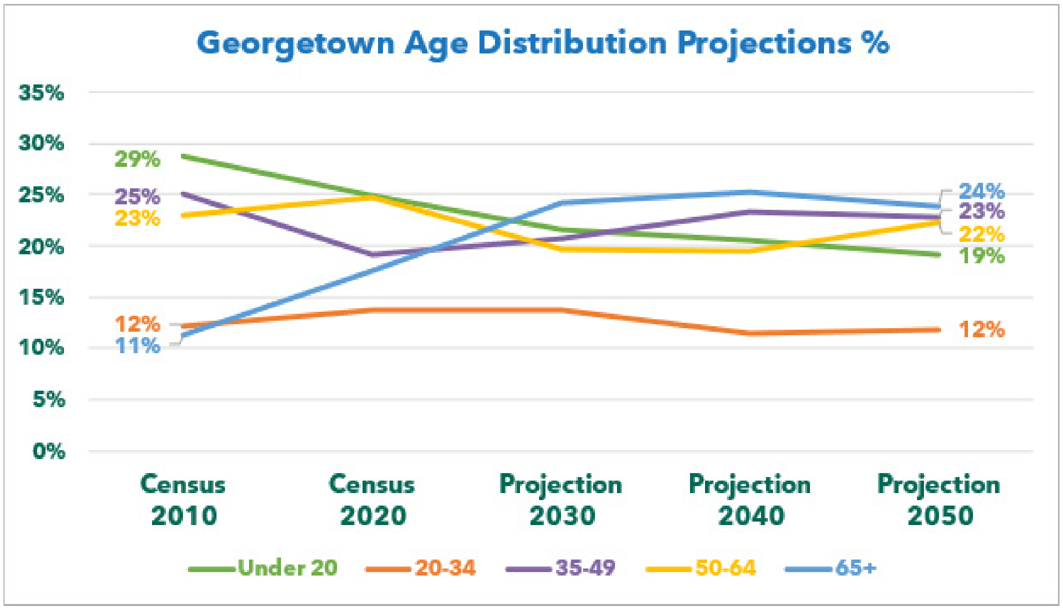


FIGURE 2: AGE DISTRIBUTION PROJECTIONS [2]

Georgetown's age projections show an aging population, suggesting a need for additional housing types suitable for downsizing and individuals on a fixed income. In some cases, lack of suitable housing may be a factor in the decrease that is projected in certain groups. Most notably, the under 20 age group proportion is projected to decrease from 2020-2050. This decrease correlates with local school enrollment data, which indicates an already-occurring steady decrease in enrollment across all school types in the Town. The decline of school-aged children in the town may be due to a lack of housing available to young families, especially if older adults do not have options for downsizing in town and decide to stay in their larger home. Meanwhile, the 65+ age group proportion is projected to increase from 11% to 24%, making up almost a quarter of Georgetown's population by 2050. With an aging population, it is crucial that the housing and personal needs of seniors are strongly integrated into the housing production conversation, especially in regard to the need or desire to downsize into physically and financially accessible housing. The need for supportive services is also an integral factor when considering where senior-friendly housing could be located.

Residents age 65+ are expected to make up 24% of all residents by 2050, an increase of 13% from 2020.

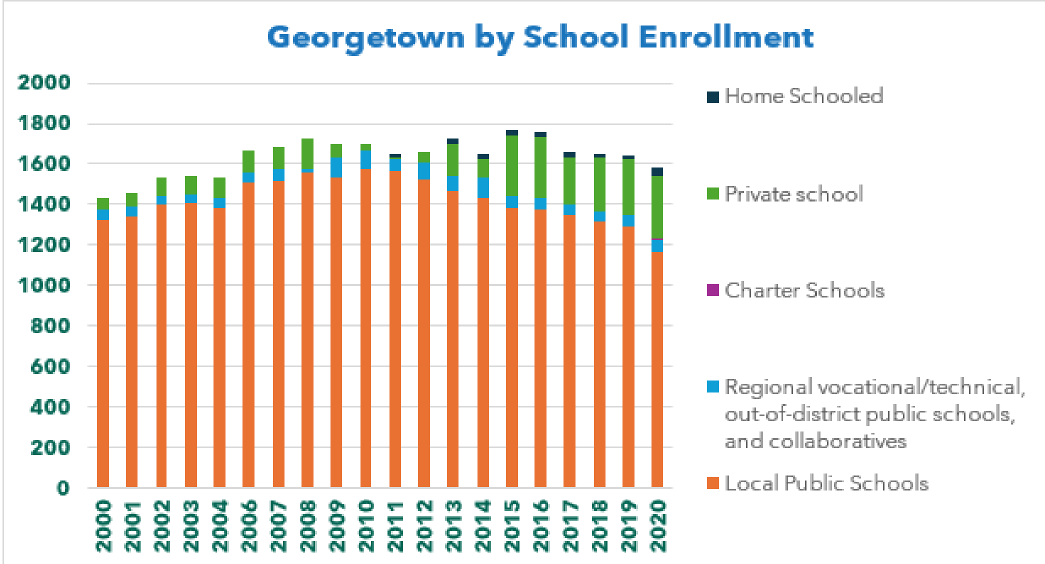


FIGURE 3: SCHOOL ENROLLMENT BY SCHOOL TYPE [3]

It is important to note that this age distribution data is based on projections from trends seen in previous years. There are several factors that determine changes in a community's age distribution. Fluctuations in birth rates, aging populations, and housing turnover rates may affect the age distribution seen in a community. If communities work to develop new housing, it may impact the projected distribution, depending on the types of housing communities are building. Despite the common belief that housing development may increase population of school aged children, there are several studies that show housing production doesn't necessarily correlate to an increase in school aged children. Based on a study conducted by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPM) that analyzed school districts across Massachusetts, there is no indication that an increase in housing production correlates with an increase in school enrollment.

> *"While it is true that schoolchildren occupying new housing units may cause a marginal change in enrollment, they are one small factor among many. In cities and towns with the most rapid housing production, enrollment barely budged; and most districts with the largest student increases saw very little housing unit change. The rate of housing unit growth is not a useful predictor of overall enrollment change, nor is rapid housing development a precondition to sudden enrollment increases."* [4]

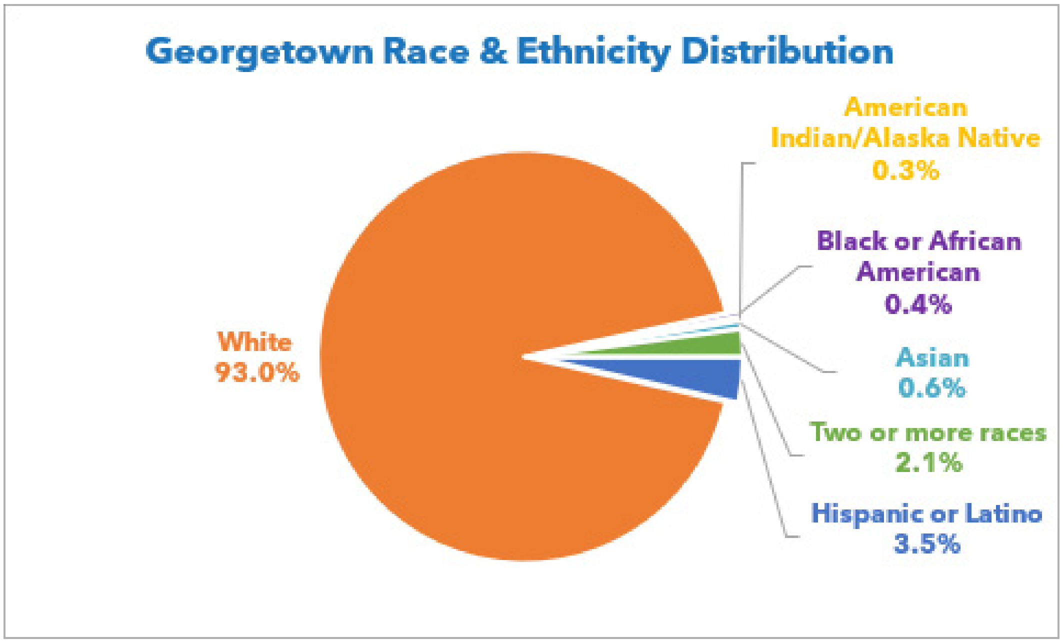


FIGURE 4: RACE & ETHNICITY DISTRIBUTION [6]

Georgetown's race & ethnicity distribution reflects the distribution across most suburban and rural communities in the Merrimack Valley, with 93% of residents identifying as non-Hispanic white. A key factor in cultivating continued diversification of and economic access to the region's communities is allowing for and developing a range of housing types—financially available to a range of prospective renters and homeowners with variable income ranges. Due to historic trends in local zoning, communities in the Merrimack Valley have been limited in offering this range of housing types. Through recent local planning efforts, however, communities in the region have begun to legalize different housing types, for renter and ownership, offering more abundant opportunities to live in these communities. With these efforts, communities like Georgetown can work to reverse the trends observed by Llana Barber in her book about Lawrence, MA, Latino City. As she writes:

> *"The emphasis on single-family zoning and the upward spiral relationship between a municipality's exclusivity, desirability, tax base, and quality of its public services, especially education, continued to render many suburbs off limits to people from urban communities of color even as explicit racial barriers fell in the post-Civil Rights era. Suburban homeownership was affordable for average U.S. Americans in the 1950s in a way that it rarely was by the 1980s, especially in the crowded Northeast, and zoning restrictions often limited the availability of rental housing to cities" (Barber, 2017, p. 26).* [5]

Household Trends

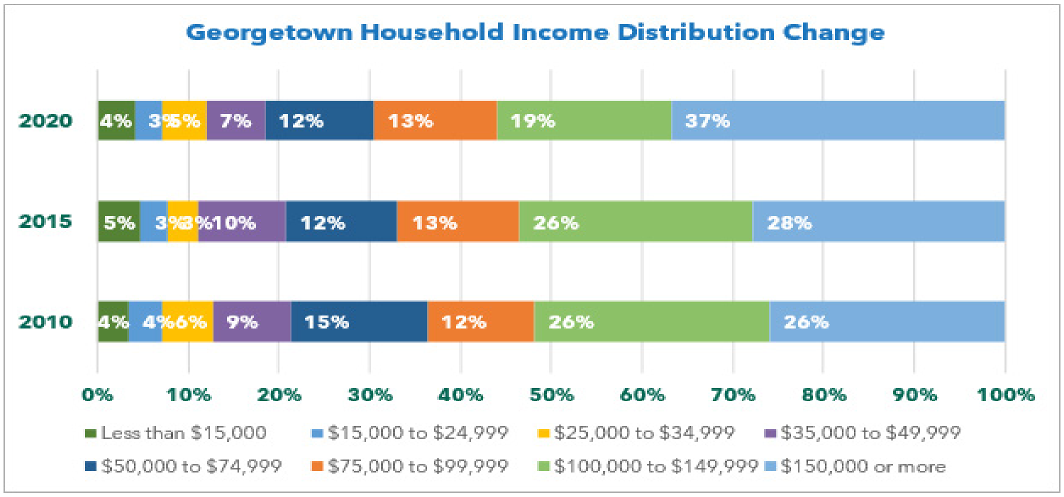


FIGURE 5: HOUSEHOLD INCOME DISTRIBUTION CHANGE [7]

Tenure	Georgetown	Merrimack Valley Region*	Essex County	Massachusetts
All Residents	$122,600	$108,174	$82,225	$84,385
Owner	$144,267	$127,308	$112,582	$110,315
Renter	$42,420	$51,875	$41,553	$47,842

TABLE 1: 2020 MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY TENURE [8]

Merrimack Valley regional median incomes are the author's calculation of the average of the estimated median incomes of the 15 towns and cities in the region.

According to the 2020 American Community Survey (ACS), Georgetown's housing stock is 78% owner occupied and 22% renter occupied. The median household income for Georgetown renters was $42,420 in 2020, and the median household income for homeowners was $144,267. This difference follows a historic wealth disparity between renters and owners state and country-wide and indicates the importance of preserving naturally occurring affordable rental opportunities for residents, in addition to promoting development of income-restricted affordable units, to meet this need.

Similarly, when discussing access and availability of units that are affordable to residents seeking both owner and rental opportunities in the Town, it is of equal importance to consider available housing types to meet individual needs.

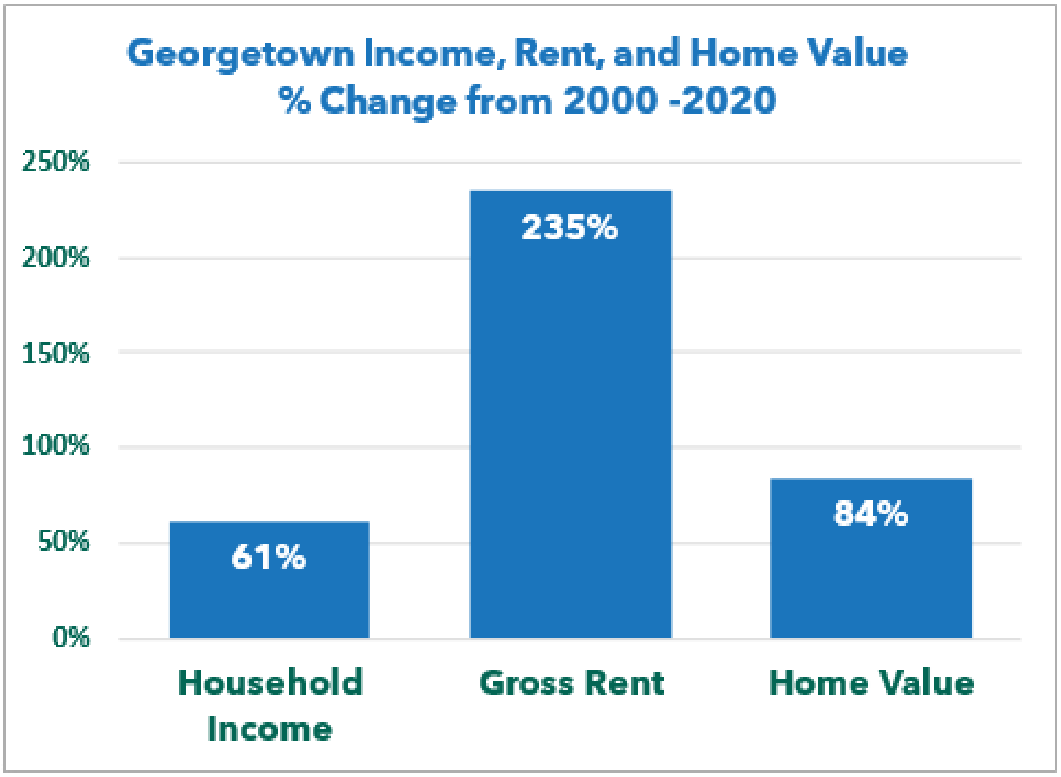


FIGURE 6: INCOME, RENT AND HOME VALUE % CHANGE FROM 2000-2020 [9]

Additionally, it is critical to observe the changes in overall housing costs in Georgetown over time to add more context to the housing landscape. Over the 20-year period between 2000 and 2020, there has been a significant increase in median household income, gross rent, and home value in the Town. While it is expected that household incomes would rise alongside rising rent and home values, there is a growing distance between median income and average rent in Georgetown – per Census data, household income has increased 61% over this period, while gross rent has increased 235% and home values have increased 84% over the same 20-year period. This difference has implications when it comes to access to homeownership opportunities in Georgetown, as higher rent costs make it harder for renters to save up enough funds for a downpayment on a home purchase and rising home values increase the amount of money a household needs to purchase a home.

Comparing a community's current housing stock and its current occupancy characteristics may provide insight into possible housing supply gaps, suggesting what types of housing development could be considered if there are sizeable gaps between occupancy counts and bedroom counts within existing structures. These observations are objective, and do not reflect individual housing type preference – for example, a two-person household may be best suited to occupy a 3-bedroom home, based on individual needs, design preference, storage needs, etc. However, these comparisons may provide more quantitative context to identify local needs, such as the desire to downsize within the community, where there potentially are not enough options to do so.

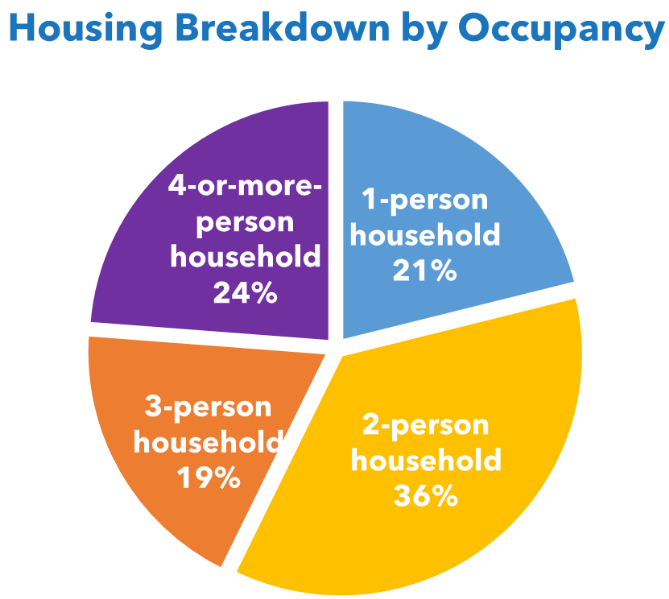


FIGURE 7: HOUSING BREAKDOWN BY OCCUPANCY [10]

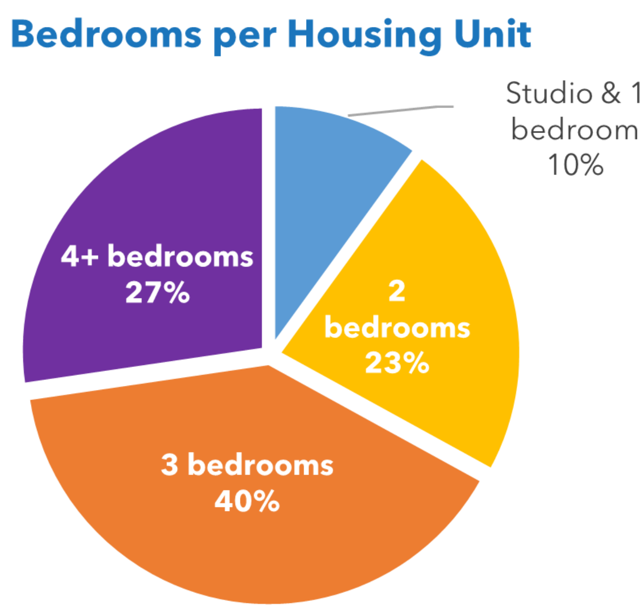


FIGURE 8: BEDROOMS PER HOUSING UNIT [11]

As is commonly seen in surrounding communities, Georgetown appears to have a lack of one or two bedroom units and an excess of three or four bedroom units. 1 or 2 person households comprise 57% of Georgetown homes, while 1 and 2 bedroom units comprise 33% of the Town's total housing stock. On the other end, 3 or more person households comprise 43% of homes, while the majority of the Town's housing stock is three or more bedroom units, at 67%. These figures may suggest a gap in availability of "right-sized" housing, which the Town could address by encouraging the development of smaller housing units consisting of studio, one, and two bedroom units.

Chapter 3: Local Housing Conditions

Housing Supply

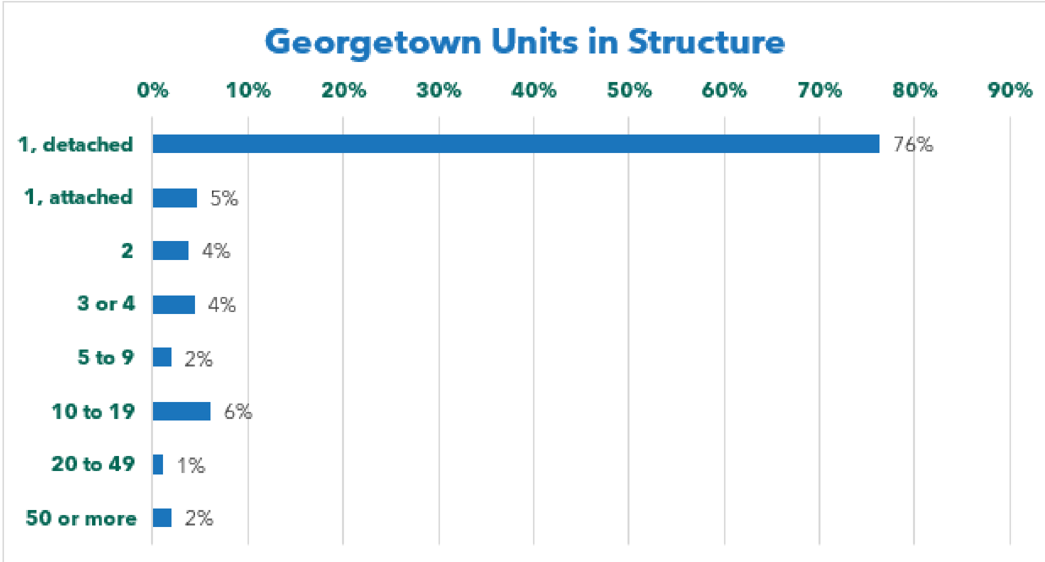


FIGURE 9: UNITS IN STRUCTURE [12]

76% of Georgetown's housing units are single-family detached homes.

As of the 2020 American Community Survey, approximately three quarters of all housing units in Georgetown are detached single-family homes. 5% of housing stock is single family attached units, which includes Townhouses. When compared to the rest of the Merrimack Valley region, Georgetown's housing stock has higher proportions of multifamily units. Given the aging population and the apparent gap in availability of smaller units (discussed above), a key strategy of this plan may be to create pathways for the creation of smaller units in multifamily developments. There are several approaches Georgetown could take to encourage these housing types, including revising zoning ordinances to allow for increased density bonuses or reduced minimum unit sizes. This may encourage developers to incorporate a mix of unit sizes, including studios and one-bedroom apartments. The Town could also collaborate with non-profit developers to facilitate the development of smaller, affordable housing units.

Currently, Georgetown has reached "Safe Harbor" status since at least 10% of the Town's housing stock are designated as affordable units. However, there are several approaches Georgetown could explore to encourage a diverse mix of housing types, including utilizing the State's Local Initiative Program. The Town could also explore revising zoning requirements to allow for increased density bonuses or reduced minimum unit sizes. This may incentivize developers to incorporate a mix of unit sizes in future housing development projects, including studios and one-bedroom apartments. The Town could also look to collaborate with non-profit developers to facilitate the development of smaller, affordable housing units.

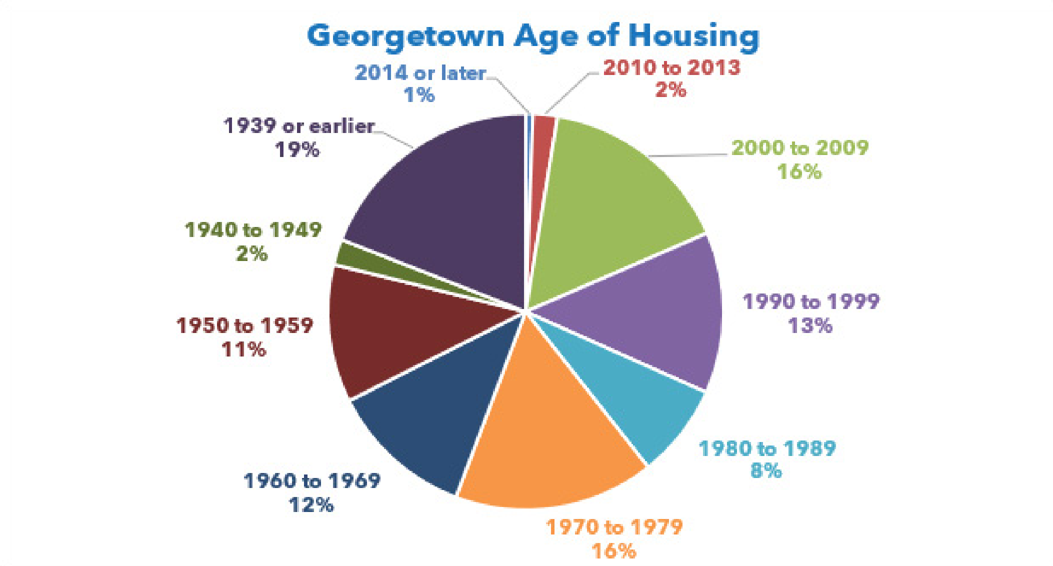


FIGURE 10: AGE OF HOUSING [13]

The age of housing is an important factor to consider in planning for future growth, as the preservation of existing housing stock is critical to the overall wellbeing of the Town's form, function, and of its residents. Georgetown, similar to other small towns in Massachusetts, is known for its quintessential New England aesthetic, where much of this character is exhibited by its housing stock. Approximately one third of the Town's housing stock was built before 1960, which is typical for many communities in the Merrimack Valley region. The Town began seeing steady housing production through the second half of the 20th century, with an uptick in construction during the 2000s. This trend in housing production during this period is similar to the historic trends seen in other suburban towns throughout Massachusetts, as families began moving out of cities to settle in the bedroom communities outside Boston. In the past decade, Georgetown saw a significant slowdown in housing construction with only 3% of the community's housing stock being built after 2010. The steady decline in new housing units being built aligns with the region-wide trends observed in other small towns across the Merrimack Valley, where there has been a significant slowdown in housing production compared to historic trends.

32% of Georgetown's housing stock are units built prior to 1960.

Trends in Residential Property Values

A review of trends in residential property values provides some perspective on housing costs in the local real estate market. Data from the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) and other sources can offer insights about residential assessed values, average single-family home values, tax rates, and tax bills for each municipality in the Commonwealth.

In FY23, the total assessed value of all residential parcels in Georgetown was $1,647,217,804, and the average assessed value of a single-family home was $596,851. Since the last iteration of the Town's HPP in 2017, the single-family assessed value has risen 48%.

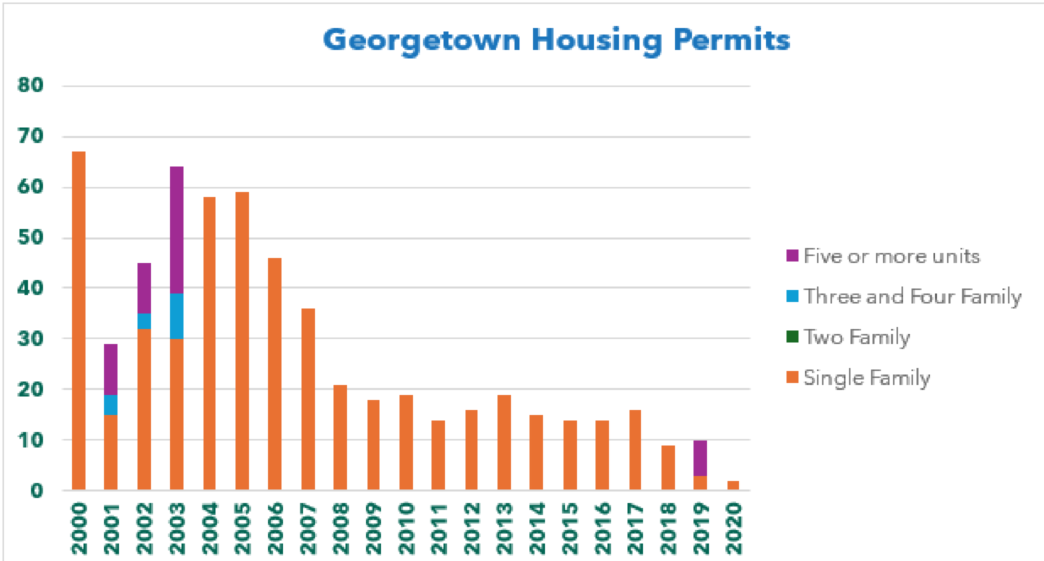


FIGURE 11: HOUSING PERMITS [14]

Georgetown has permitted a significant number of single-family housing units since 2000, as well as several multi-family developments.

Permitting Activity

Over the last two decades, permitting activity in Georgetown has varied by total permits issued per year and by building type. In the early 2000s, Georgetown permitted a significant amount of new housing, including single family homes as well as several multi-family housing structures. In the decade following, there was a general decline in housing production. One multi-family housing development was permitted in 2019, but otherwise Georgetown mainly permitted new single-family homes albeit at a lower rate than the 2000s. Since 2020, there have been a few new housing developments permitted that include mixed-use multi-family units along with several detached and attached townhouse-style units.

Housing Characteristics

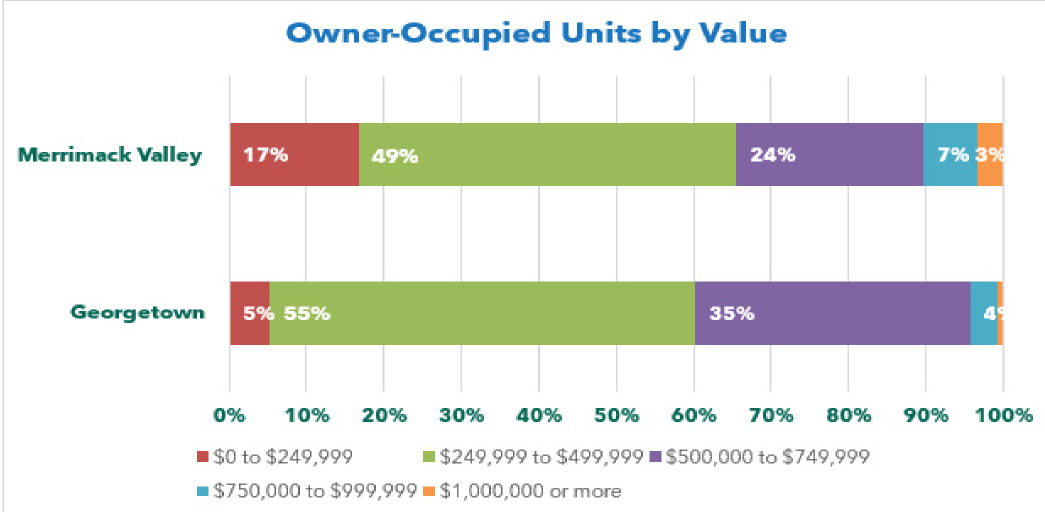


FIGURE 12: OWNER-OCCUPIED UNITS BY VALUE [15]

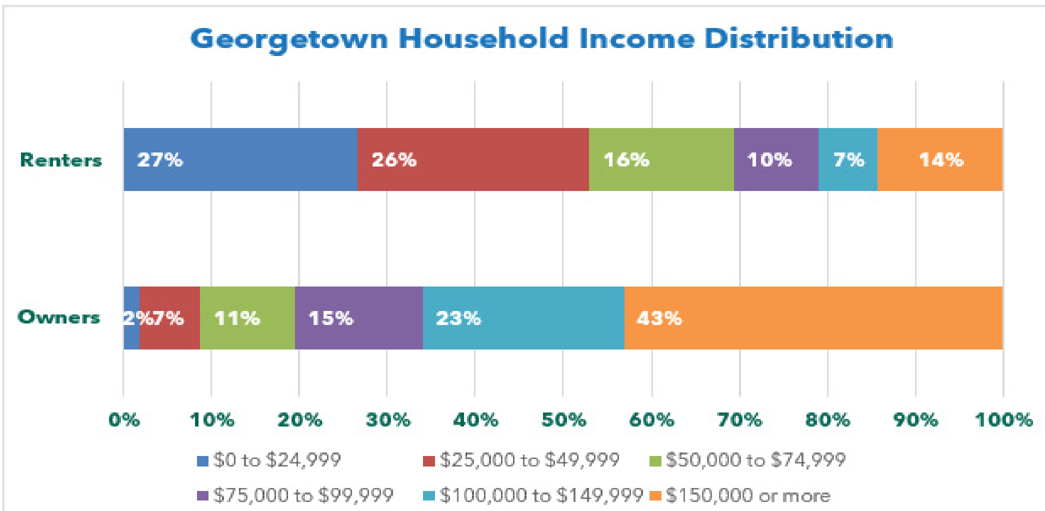


FIGURE 13: HOUSEHOLD INCOME DISTRIBUTION [16]

~40% of owner-occupied units have a household income over $150,000, compared to just 14% of renter-occupied units.

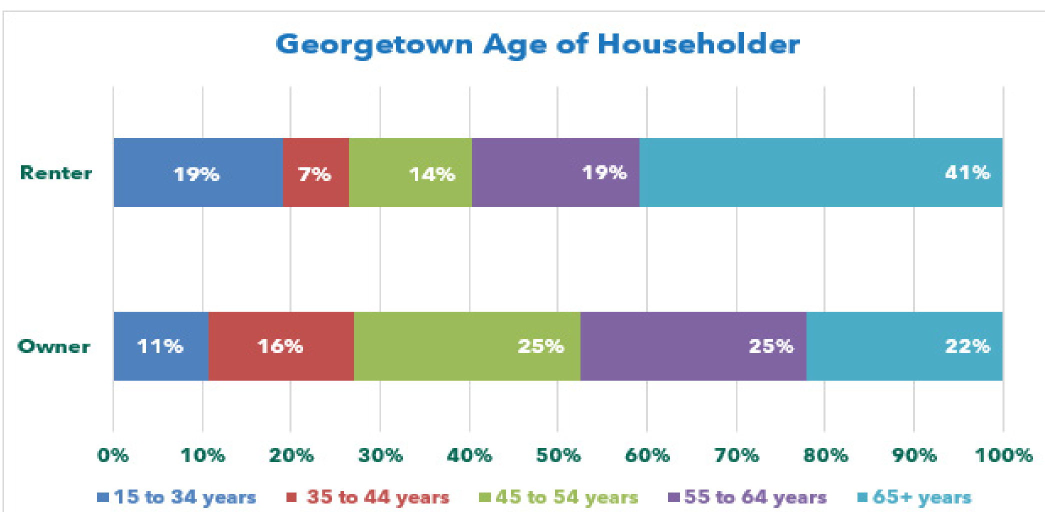


FIGURE 14: AGE OF HOUSEHOLDER [17]

Owner occupied units in Georgetown have higher household incomes than renters, as is on trend historically and across the state and region. In Georgetown, almost half of all owner-occupied units meet or exceed $150,000 in annual household income, with the next largest proportion in the $100,000-$149,999 range. This differs greatly from renter-occupied units, where approximately half of households make $50,000 or less. This difference indicates a significant disparity in the overall income distribution of renters versus owners, a crucial difference that impacts renters disproportionately when housing costs continue to rise.

Housing Affordability

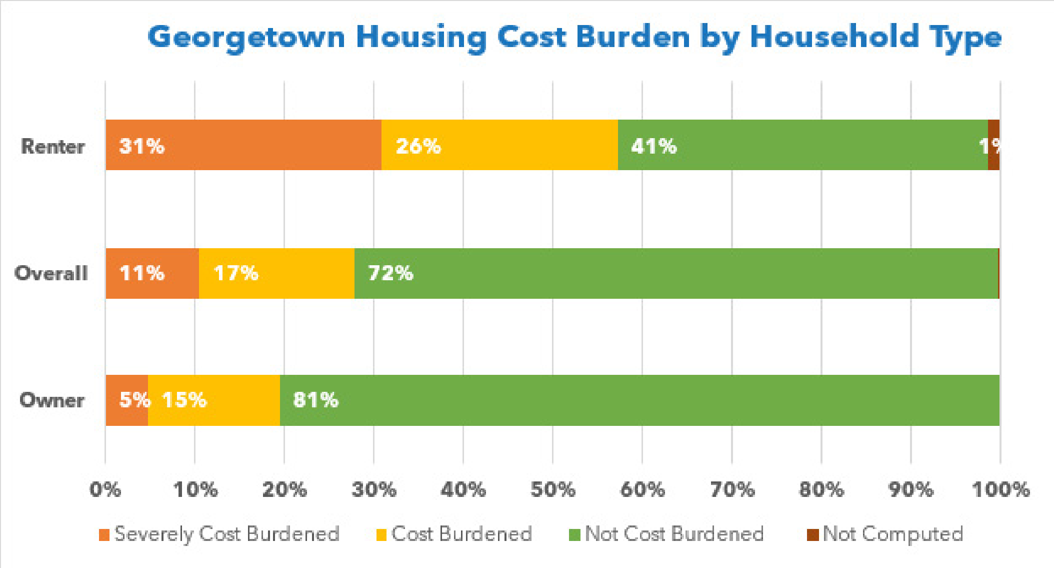


FIGURE 15: HOUSING COST BURDEN BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE [18]

Per the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), household cost burden is defined as "…a household that spends more than 30 percent of its gross income on housing costs, including utilities. A household is severely cost burdened if it spends more than 50 percent of its income on housing." Approximately one quarter of all residents residing in Georgetown are cost burdened, while over half of renter households in Georgetown are cost burdened. The percentage of cost burdened owner households is significant as well, with approximately 1 out of 5 homeowners paying a significant portion of their income on housing expenses.

These figures demonstrate that a sizeable portion of the Georgetown community is confronted with high housing costs, which could have several personal and community-wide implications. If residents continue to experience ever-increasing housing costs, individuals and families with limited financial resources may struggle to afford and maintain access to suitable housing, in addition to experiencing limitations in economic mobility and wealth accumulation. High housing costs carry significant economic development implications, particularly concerning the local workforce. As housing expenses escalate, and a greater share of monthly income is dedicated to meeting these costs, the likelihood increases that workers are unable to reside directly within the community where their employment is based. This dynamic can have negative effects on local economic development, including commuting challenges and overall workforce stability. Understanding the impact of cost burden among homeowners and renters alike is crucial for policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders to develop targeted strategies that promote housing affordability and economic well-being for a broader segment of the population.

57% of all renters and 20% of homeowners in Georgetown are housing cost burdened.

Age of Householder	Georgetown		Merrimack Valley		Essex County		Massachusetts	
	Est.	%	Est.	%	Est.	%	Est.	%
Total Population	8,723	100%	349,866	100%	770,223	100%	6,637,329	100%
Total in Poverty	260	3%	36,677	10%	78,089	10%	653,454	10%
Under 5 years	0	0%	3,047	8%	6,778	9%	47,069	7%
5 to 17 years	67	26%	8,237	22%	15,691	20%	117,012	18%
18 to 34 years	36	14%	8,055	22%	16,840	22%	183,304	28%
35 to 64 years	50	19%	11,992	33%	26,087	33%	207,736	32%
65 years+	107	41%	5,346	15%	12,693	16%	98,333	15%

TABLE 2: POPULATION IN HOUSEHOLDS BELOW FEDERAL POVERTY THRESHOLDS BY AGE [19]

Affordability Gap

As cited in the previous HPP, housing sale prices in Georgetown continue to increase significantly and are out of reach even for median-income households. According to Redfin home sale data, the 2024 average sales price in Georgetown was $762,000. Georgetown households making the median household income of $122,600 could afford to purchase a home up to $430,000 with a $43,000 downpayment. However, the average sales price of $762,000 requires an annual gross household income of about $200,000 with a 10% down payment, when factoring in costs for taxes and insurance and current interest rates of about 6.7%.

As shown in Table 3, there is a difference between homeowners' median income and the price of a home, creating a homeowner affordability gap. This gap is defined as the difference between the median sales price for Georgetown and the 'affordable price' (household paying no more than 30 percent of annual income on housing).

Income (Lawrence, MA-NH – HFMA)*	Average Sales Price Georgetown	Affordable Price	Gap
80% of Median = $104,200	$762,000	$356,000	$406,000
100% of Median = $141,300	$762,000	$505,000	$257,000

TABLE 3: HOUSING AFFORDABILITY CALCULATIONS [20]

Based on 4-person household; 2025 HUD Income Limits

Ownership Affordability by Income

As seen in the above table, a household of four in Georgetown with 80 percent AMI could afford to purchase a home up to $356,000, with a downpayment of $35,000. However, the average sales price for a single-family home in Georgetown in 2024 was $762,000 according to Redfin market data, meaning a household would have to make about $181,000 per year to afford a home at the average sales price. At the Georgetown Median Household Income of $122,600 a household could afford a home up to $430,000 with a $43,000 downpayment.

Rental Affordability by Income

A two-person household with extremely low income (less than or equal to 30 percent AMI) can afford a gross rent of up to $754 per month for a one-bedroom unit in the Lawrence HMFA. A two-person household with very low income (greater than 30 percent and less than or equal to 50 percent AMI) can afford a gross rent of up to $1,256 per month for a one-bedroom unit, and a two-person household with low-income household (greater than 50 percent and less than or equal to 80 percent) can afford a gross rent of $1,834 per month for the same unit size. A household with the HMFA Area Median Income can afford a monthly gross rent of $2,292.

Income Distribution by HAMFI*	Owner	% of All Households	% of Owners	Renter	% of All Households	% of Renters	Total
Household Income <= 30% HAMFI	35	1%	1%	195	6%	27%	230
Household Income >30% to <=50% HAMFI	75	2%	3%	140	4%	19%	215
Household Income >50% to <=80% HAMFI	310	9%	12%	145	4%	20%	455
Household Income >80% to <=100% HAMFI	270	8%	10%	85	3%	12%	355
Household Income >100% HAMFI	1,890	57%	73%	170	5%	23%	2,060
Total	2,585			735			3,320

TABLE 4: INCOME DISTRIBUTION BY HAMFI [21]

HAMFI: HUD Area Median Family Income. This is the median family income calculated by HUD for each jurisdiction, in order to determine Fair Market Rents (FMRs) and income limits for HUD programs. HAMFI will not necessarily be the same as other calculations of median incomes (such as a simple Census number), due to a series of adjustments that are made (For full documentation of these adjustments, consult the HUD Income Limit Briefing Materials). If you see the terms "area median income" (AMI) or "median family income" (MFI) used in the CHAS, assume it refers to HAMFI.

Referencing HUD Area Median Family Income (HAMFI) figures, of all Georgetown households, 27% earn 80% AMI or below, regardless of tenure type. The highest percentage of households making 80% AMI or below are renters, with 65% of renters falling within the income category of less than or equal to 80% AMI.

45% of all renters are making below 50% of the Area Median income.

Chapter 4: Housing Development Constraints

Environmental Constraints

Georgetown, situated around the center of the Merrimack Valley region, has a landscape of low and gently rolling hills and expansive woodlands. Outside of the few hills, the town is mostly flat and has sizable freshwater wetlands, streams, and ponds.

Recently updated federal insurance rate maps show that flooding is considered a high risk in Georgetown, and the Town's 2020 Hazard Mitigation Plan states:

> *Increased flooding has been observed in areas mapped as part of the 100-year floodplain as well as areas near the 100-year floodplain. Based on land use maps, there are large areas of impermeable surfaces including buildings, roads, and parking roads in or near the 100-foot floodplain. However, there are also large areas of open space and undeveloped land in and near the floodplain as well as adjacent to waterways and wetlands.*

When considering sites for future housing development in town, care should be taken to minimize new impervious surfaces. If developing in current open space, proper stormwater management may help alleviate the risks posed by flooding. Wetland areas are particularly sensitive to flooding and heavy rainfall, and local observations suggest that some wetlands may have expanded since the last update of the MassDEP Wetlands Inventory in 2017. Housing development near these protected areas may warrant increased caution, including adherence to current conservation regulations and careful site planning to avoid negative impacts on the wetlands.

In addition to flooding, protracted regional drought remains an environmental concern. The Town's 2017 Hazard Mitigation Plan listed drought as a moderate concern, citing recent region and statewide drought events. Since the creation of that plan, drought has remained a concern, with the Town experiencing moderate to severe drought conditions in 2024. An assessment of the Town's water supply may be beneficial to plan for future housing development. Additionally, future housing development could focus on housing unit types that use less water. Large, single family detached homes on large lots use more water—with more than half of their water usage consumed for outdoor uses such as pools and lawn irrigation—when compared to multifamily, townhouse, or apartment units. [22]

Infrastructure

Transportation

The Town of Georgetown is connected to the rest of the Merrimack Valley region through interstate access and state roads, as well as several municipal roads. Interstate 95 provides transportation access on the eastern side of Town. Route 133 runs east-west while Route 97 runs north-south across the center of Georgetown, ultimately intersecting in the downtown area. Both of these roads are major thoroughfares through Town and connect Georgetown with surrounding communities along with several residences and businesses.

While there are currently no fixed bus route services provided through MeVa (Merrimack Valley Transit), Georgetown continues to explore opportunities to expand services into the Town. MeVa does provide a Ring & Ride service to residents of Georgetown, which allows them to connect to existing fixed bus routes as well as other destinations throughout the region.

Georgetown also continues to focus on developing the Border to Boston Trail, which helps connect the Town to other communities in the Merrimack Valley through active transportation routes. Bicycle and pedestrian improvements along Routes 133 and 97 and other areas in the Town will continue to expand these active transportation connections.

Sewer and Water

Georgetown provides public drinking water to the majority of Town from several municipal wells that draw water from the Parker River Aquifer located in the western side of Town. Households that are not services by public water rely on the use of private wells. Georgetown has no municipal sewer system, so the Town relies on individual on-site septic systems for their wastewater disposal.

Regulatory Considerations

Residential Zoning

Georgetown has several different residential zoning districts, each having different uses or dimensional parameters. Most land area in town is zoned for single family detached structures, with limited areas allowing multifamily housing.

According to the Town, “the purposes of a site plan approval are to protect the health, safety, convenience, and welfare of the inhabitants of the Town of Georgetown as well as the natural resources that people depend on by providing a comprehensive review of land use and development plans”.

The following zones allow for residential development of various types and densities throughout the Town:

Residential Districts

Central Residential (RA) is a low-density residential district mainly allowing for the development of single-family housing by-right along with accessory apartments through a special permit from the Board of Appeals. Multi-family dwelling units, apartment houses, or conversions of single-family homes into multi-family housing are also allowed through a special permit from the Board of Appeals. Open space residential developments are allowed in this district through a special permit from the Planning Board. The minimum lot size in this district is 15,000 SF for single-family homes. For multi-family dwellings or apartments, this district requires a 10,000 SF minimum per unit for the first two units with an additional 10,000 square feet per additional unit. The maximum building height in this district is 2 ½ stories or 35 feet. This district is located in the neighborhoods surrounding downtown Georgetown along Routes 97 and 133.

Outside Residential B (RB) is a low-density residential district mainly allowing for the development of single-family housing by-right along with accessory apartments through a special permit from the Board of Appeals. Single-family homes are also allowed to be converted into multi-family housing through a permit from the Board of Appeals. Open space residential developments are allowed in this district through a special permit from the Planning Board. The minimum lot size in this district is 40,000 SF for single-family homes. For multi-family units, this district requires a 20,000 SF minimum per unit for the first two units with an additional 10,000 SF per additional unit. The maximum building height in this district is 2 ½ stories or 35 feet. This district is located throughout most of the eastern side of town, as well as a few neighborhoods along Route 133 to the west and several parcels directly along Route 97 to the south.

Outside Residential C (RC) is another low-density residential district with the same uses permitted in the Outer Residential B district. The minimum lot size in this district is 80,000 SF for single-family homes. For multi-family units, this district requires a 40,000 SF minimum per unit for the first two units with an additional 10,000 SF per additional unit. The maximum building height in this district is 2 ½ stories or 35 feet. This district is located throughout most of the western side of town, as well as a few neighborhoods south of Route 133 and east of Route 97. There are also two other areas in this district located to the north of Jewett Street and Jackman Street on either side of I-95.

Business Districts

Business and Commercial District A (CA) is a zoning district that allows a variety of multi-family housing types through a special permit process. Multi-family dwelling units, apartment houses, or conversions of single-family homes into multi-family housing are allowed through a special permit from the Board of Appeals. Mixed-use developments are also allowed through a special permit from the Planning Board. For multi-family dwellings or apartments, this district requires a 10,000 SF minimum per unit for the first two units with an additional 10,000 SF per additional unit. The maximum building height in this district is 2 ½ stories or 40 feet. This zoning district encompasses several parcels along downtown Georgetown.

Business and Commercial District B (CB) is a zoning district similar to Business and Commercial District A, however this district only allows mixed-use developments through a special permit from the Planning Board. The minimum lot size in this district is 40,000 SF and the maximum height is 2 ½ stories or 40 feet. This zoning district encompasses the area around the southern side of downtown Georgetown.

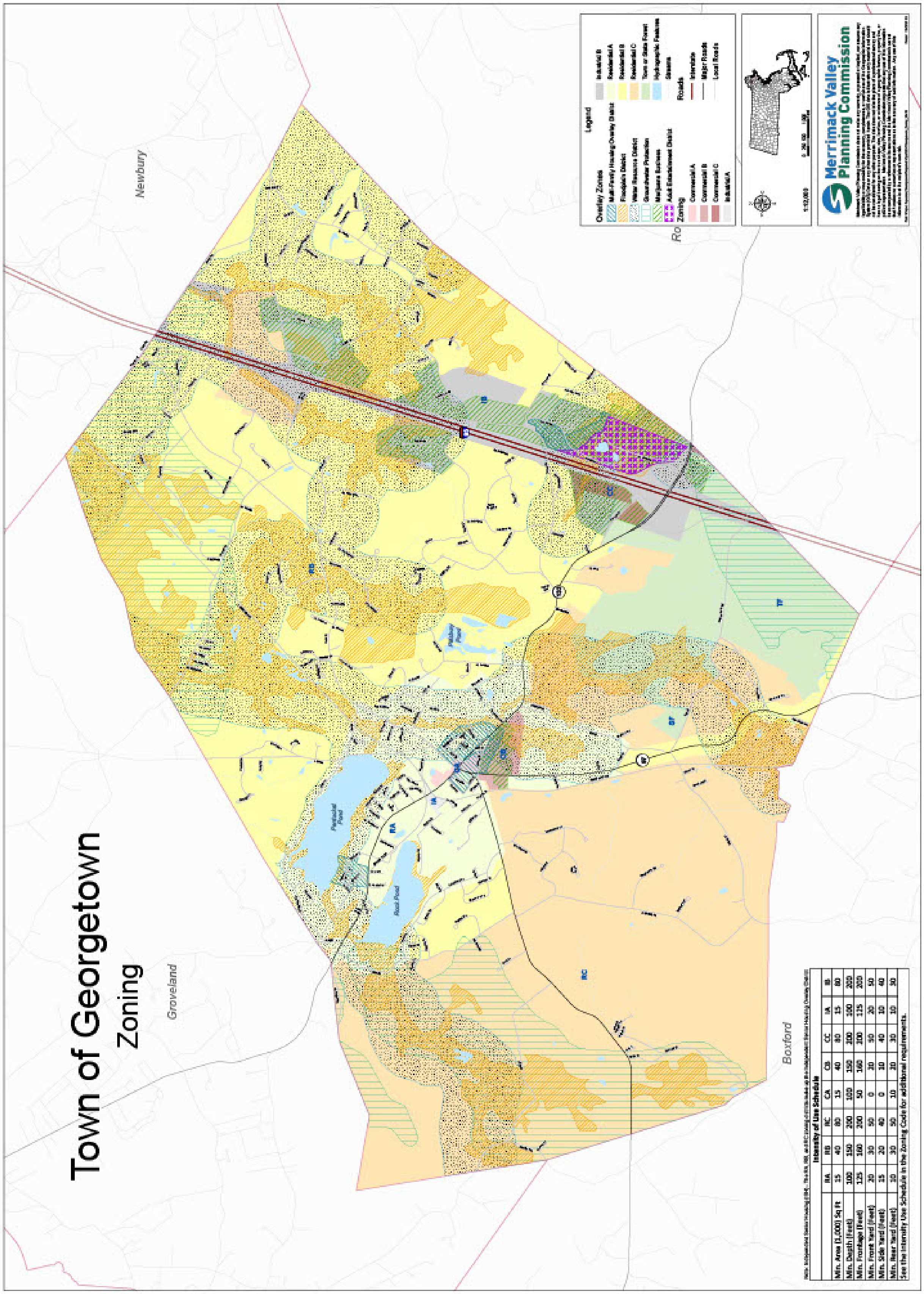
Industrial Districts

Light Industrial District A (IA) is a zoning district that allows a variety of multi-family housing types through a special permit process. Multi-family dwelling units, apartment houses, or conversions of single-family homes into multi-family housing are allowed through a special permit from the Board of Appeals. For multi-family dwellings or apartments, this district requires a 10,000 SF minimum per unit for the first two units with an additional 10,000 SF per additional unit. The maximum building height in this district is 2 stories or 40 feet. This zoning district encompasses a few parcels along Route 97 near downtown Georgetown.

Overlay Districts

MBTA Communities Multi-Family Downtown Plus Overlay District (MCMOD) is a recently approved zoning district that allows multi-family housing by-right. Two-family dwelling units are also allowed by-right, along with business uses as allowed in the Business and Commercial A zoning district when part of a mixed-use development and located on the ground floor. The overlay district requires a minimum lot size of 5,000 SF, except in the Downtown sub-district which requires a 10,000 SF minimum lot size. There is a maximum height limit of 3 stories and 40 feet, except in the Downtown sub-district which requires a maximum height limit of 2 ½ stories and 35 feet. The overlay district also establishes a maximum of 15 dwelling units per acre for each sub-district. Any new housing development of three or more housing units are subject to the Town's Inclusionary Housing Balance Bylaw, which requires at least 10% of new housing units to be designated as affordable housing. This district encompasses three sub-districts located around the Downtown, the Housing Authority along Trestle Way, and the Longview apartment complex along Patriot Lane.

Town Zoning Map



Year	0.5% Increase				1.0% Increase			
	Additional Affordable Units - 0.5%	Number of Total Affordable Units	Total Units	Percent Affordable	Additional Affordable Units - 1%	Number of Affordable Units	Total Units	Percent Affordable
Current		351	3,151	11.14%		351	3,151	11.14%
2024	16	367	3,167	11.65%	32	383	3,183	12.15%
2025	16	383	3,183	12.15%	32	415	3,215	13.17%
2026	16	399	3,199	12.66%	32	447	3,247	14.19%
2027	16	415	3,215	13.17%	32	479	3,279	15.20%
2028	16	431	3,231	13.68%	32	511	3,311	16.22%

TABLE 5: 5-YEAR HOUSING PRODUCTION NUMERIC GOALS

The goal for each city and town in Massachusetts, as defined by MA General Law Ch. 40B, is to have 10% of its housing stock designated as affordable and listed on the State's Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI). Until that 10% is reached, a community can use a certified Housing Production Plan to demonstrate its progress towards that 10% goal and allow the community more control over local development. As explained in the introduction, this Housing Production Plan can be certified by the state if the Town adds affordable housing units at a rate equal to 0.5% or 1% of its current housing units annually. At the 0.5% rate, the HPP will be certified for one year, which would allow the town's Zoning Board of Appeals to deny a comprehensive permit to a development application under M.G.L. 40B. At the 1% rate, the HPP will be certified for two years.

The Town of Georgetown currently has 351 subsidized housing units listed on the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) as of June 2023. This number represents 11.14% percent of the total year-round housing units as reported by the 2020 U.S Census. If Georgetown were to produce 0.5 percent of its total units annually as SHI units, the Town would need to add an additional 16 SHI-eligible housing units each year. In order to produce 1 percent of its total units annually, the Town would have to produce 32 SHI units annually. However, Georgetown is one of the few communities in the Merrimack Valley that has already reached the 10 percent affordable housing goal. Over the next five years and beyond, the goal is for Georgetown to maintain the 10% 40B minimum. Provided the Town takes a proactive approach to housing development, it is possible for Georgetown to continue to maintain this status over the next five years.

Housing Production Strategies

Based on the local needs, existing resources, and development considerations, the following recommended strategies have been developed with Georgetown. The proposed strategies were developed after conversations with residents and town staff to help the community direct and leverage funding, resources, and capacity to best meet the community's housing needs.

While some of the strategies do not directly create affordable units, they do serve as a foundation for achieving housing goals, including the creation of a more diverse housing stock in town.

Strategy 1: Ensure Georgetown's updated Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) bylaw aligns with the new state guidelines.

- In August 2024, Governor Healey signed the Affordable Homes Act into law requiring communities to allow Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) up to 900 SF to be built by-right in single-family zoning districts. In response to the new law, Georgetown residents approved a zoning amendment at the 2025 Spring Town Meeting to align with state regulations. The revised bylaw will allow additional flexibility for homeowners looking to create an accessory unit to their property.

Strategy 2: Investigate models that address creation of starter homes that are "right-sized."

- A common concern heard amongst residents during community engagement sessions was the lack of "starter homes" or homes appropriate for downsizing in the community. This commonly refers to housing units, either detached or in a condominium development, that are ownership units containing 1, 2, or 3 bedrooms. If detached, these units are typically on smaller lots.
- One way to address this would be for the Town to explore the feasibility of adopting a "Starter Home District" pursuant to MA General Law Chapter 40Y. According to this statue, a starter home is considered to be a single-family home under 1,850 square feet. In the starter home district, single-family homes would be allowed by-right at a minimum density of 4 units per acre. Accessory Dwelling Units up to 900 square feet would also be allowed on the same lot as the starter home. The statute also specifies that in each starter home zoning district, at least half of the starter homes must contain at least three bedrooms.
  - In addition to these statutory requirements, the state's Department of Housing and Livable Communities is expected to promulgate regulations to guide communities in their adoption of these districts. The Town could consider the potential benefits of a 40Y district following a review of the state regulations.
  - If Georgetown adopts a 40Y district pursuant to the soon-to-be released regulations, the Town is eligible for incentive payments from the state for both establishing the zoning and for the creation of new units in the district. These incentive payments follow the same structure as 40R zoning districts. More information is available here.

- Georgetown's population is aging, which may create an increasing demand for smaller housing types with one-story living. Utilizing the State's Local Initiative Program, the Town may wish to encourage the development of smaller housing types that may allow residents to age in place within their community. Investigating and adopting general design guidelines for cottage-style housing development and low-density multi-family housing may encourage more opportunities for this style of development. This may include potential zoning changes that could encourage a variety of housing options, including expediting permitting processes for residential development proposals. Reducing minimum lot sizes may also encourage the development of smaller housing units, though it could also present challenges for meeting Title V requirements. The Town has already taken initial steps toward zoning reform through the adoption of the MBTA Communities Multifamily Downtown Plus Overlay District, which allows multi-family housing by-right in designated areas of Georgetown.

Strategy 3: Utilize Georgetown's Affordable Housing Trust to encourage the creation of new affordable housing units.

- The Town is interested in cataloguing existing foreclosed and Town owned properties to identify suitable sites for affordable housing development. Factors to consider include current zoning regulations, proximity to amenities, environmental considerations, and community impact.
    - With municipally-owned land the Town is willing to donate, Georgetown could issue an RFP for affordable housing developers to take over the land and build affordable housing on site. Organizations such as Bread & Roses Housing and Habitat for Humanity have worked in communities across the region on this type of development.
- Georgetown's AHT could also continue examining opportunities to purchase properties to increase the availability of affordable housing units in Town. The Town currently has over 10% of its housing stock listed on the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), which grants Georgetown Safe Harbor status. However, continuing to expand the number of SHI units in Georgetown will help maintain this status as the Town continues to grow. As the AHT continues to pursue its current acquisition and resale strategy, it is important to ensure community housing needs are being met.
- The AHT may also look to create relationships and partnerships with developers who have experience in utilizing applicable tax credits to develop affordable housing. This may include the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) along with other effective affordable housing financing tools.

Strategy 4: Expand Affordable Housing Trust direct financial support offerings.

- The Affordable Housing Trust in Georgetown is an excellent resource for providing direct housing financial assistance. Currently, the AHT provides a rental assistance program to provide direct support to renters in town. The Trust is interested in exploring additional funding opportunities to expand this program to assist more renters in the community.
- The Affordable Housing Trust may wish to explore additional opportunities for direct financial assistance to homeowners in Town, which may help residents offset rising housing costs and provide additional access

to housing opportunities. In North Andover, the Affordable Housing Trust has partnered with Bread & Roses Housing to provide downpayment assistance to qualified home buyers using Community Preservation Act funding. Georgetown may look to similar programs offered by other communities to explore the feasibility of developing their own downpayment or rental assistance programs.

- Georgetown adopted the Community Preservation Act in 2001, which provides funding for the Affordable Housing Trust. Each year, it is recommended that 10% of CPA funds be transferred to the Affordable Housing Trust at Georgetown's annual Town Meeting. The Affordable Housing Trust can also request additional CPA funding if there are specific projects the AHT may wish to pursue. While the minimum recommendation for transferring CPA funds is 10%, the AHT requests and often receives additional funding to acquire additional properties for affordable housing development. Continuing to pursue additional funding above the 10% minimum allows the AHT to increase the number of new affordable housing units along with expanding current and future programming offerings.

Strategy 5: Continue to support and develop senior housing initiatives to help residents age in place.

- The AHT is looking to explore the feasibility of expanding the Senior Property Tax Work Off program to provide additional opportunities for relief of property tax burden for senior residents. This program currently allows qualified senior homeowners above 60 years of age to work in the municipal government for a $500 tax abatement. The Trust would be interested in identifying additional funding opportunities in order to expand access to this program to more seniors.
- The AHT is also interested in examining successful programs in other communities to provide senior residents with financial assistance to allow them to remain in their homes. In Norfolk, a new Retire in Place Assistance (RIPA) program provides small grants for eligible senior residents to repair and rehabilitate their properties. Georgetown's AHT is currently in the process of establishing a similar program.

Strategy 6: Achieve full compliance with the MBTA Communities Act and identify resources needed to accommodate new development in the MBTA Communities Multifamily Overlay District.

- The Town recently approved the MBTA Communities Multifamily Downtown Plus Overlay District through a locally informed process that best fit Georgetown's housing needs and community. As an "Adjacent Community," Georgetown had greater flexibility in meeting MBTA Communities requirements. The Town was ultimately able to identify appropriate district locations and dimensional standards that both comply with the Act and create opportunities for the development of much-needed housing types. The Town was also able to keep maximum building heights consistent with current zoning to ensure future development is at a scale and quality consistent with other areas of town.
- Once Georgetown receives a district compliance determination letter from EOHLC, the Town would become eligible to apply for the MBTA Communities Catalyst Fund to support activities related to housing creation. This could include infrastructure projects associated with housing, along with acquiring property to promote housing development.

Strategies	Time to Complete	Strategy Implementer(s)	Key First Steps and Funding Options
Ensure Georgetown's updated Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) bylaw aligns with the new state guidelines	1 year	Town Staff, Planning Board	► Review the state's ADU draft regulations and compare the guidelines to Georgetown's current ADU bylaw ► Work with the Planning Board to determine any changes to be made to the bylaw
Investigate models for the creation of "starter homes" that are "right-sized	2-3 years	Town Staff, Planning Board	► Review the 40Y statute to learn basic requirements, including review of incentive payments under chapter 40R the town could be eligible for ► Upon release of state regulations, review regulations and discuss with the planning board the desire to implement a 40Y district in Georgetown ► Encourage the development of smaller housing types utilizing the State's Local Initiative Program
Utilize Georgetown's Affordable Housing Trust to encourage the creation of new affordable housing units	Ongoing	Affordable Housing Trust, Town Staff	► Inventory existing municipal properties ► Work with Affordable Housing Trust to identify sites best suited for affordable housing reuse ► Meet with organizations like Habitat for Humanity or Bread and Roses Housing to learn how they can assist with development of affordable housing on Town-owned land
Expand Affordable Housing Trust direct financial support offerings	2-3 Years	Affordable Housing Trust, Town Staff	► Explore models other communities are using for financial support, such as Concord's Senior Tax Exemption program ► Explore opportunities to expand direct financial support to renters as well as homeowners through the development of downpayment assistance programs
Continue to support and develop senior housing initiatives to help residents age in place	Ongoing	Town Staff, Planning Board	► Expand the Senior Property Tax Work Off program to provide additional housing cost relief to seniors in Georgetown ► Examine successful programs in other communities that provide senior residents with additional financial assistance, such as Norfolk's Retire in Place Assistance (RIPA)
Achieve full compliance with the MBTA Communities Law.	Ongoing	Planning Board, Select Board, Town Staff	► Thanks to working with MVPC and relevant town boards, the Town developed a 3A compliant bylaw that is best fit for Georgetown ► Identify opportunities to utilize resources available to encourage housing development for compliant MBTA Communities, including the Catalyst Fund

TABLE 6: ACTION PLAN MATRIX

2025-2030 Housing Production Plan Map

Site Name	Housing Type	Development/ Zoning Type	Status	Tenure	Affordability	Affordable Units	Total Units
Barry Way	Single-Family	Subdivision	Completed	Ownership			3
47 West Street			Permitted	Ownership	Mixed	4	16
66 Parish Road	Condo	Subdivision	Permitted	Ownership	Mixed	2	10
206 West Main Street	Townhouses		Permitted		Mixed	1	9
188 East Main Street		Potential small-scale multi-family conversion	Conceptual				
33 Library Street	Mixed Use Multi-Family		Conceptual				
24-26 Central Street	Mixed Use Multi-Family		Conceptual				
203 East Main Street	Mixed Use Multi-Family	Potential comprehensive permit	Conceptual		Mixed		
38 East Main Street	Mixed Use Multi-Family	Zoned for mixed-use commercial and residential	Conceptual	Rental	Mixed	1	8
MBTA Communities Multi-family Overlay District	Mixed Use Multi-Family		Conceptual				

TABLE 7: HOUSING SITE LIST

Endnotes

[1] *UMASS* Donahue Institute, Massachusetts Population Projections

[2] UMASS Donahue Institute, Massachusetts Population Projections, “Age/Sex Details”

[3] MA Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, School and District Profiles

[4] The Waning Influence of Housing Production on Public School Enrollment in Massachusetts. Metropolitan Area Planning Council. October 2017.

[5] Barber, Llana. Latino City: Immigration and Urban Crisis in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1945-2000. The University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

[6] U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2016-2020 5-year Estimates, Table DP05

[7] 2006-2010 ACS Estimates, 2011-2015 ACS Estimates, 2016- 2020 ACS Estimates, Table B19001

[8] 2016-2020 ACS Estimates, Table B25119

[9] 2000, 2010, and 2020 Decennial Census; Tables DP3 & DP4

[10] 2016-2020 ACS Estimates, Table S2501

[11] 2016-2020 ACS Estimates, Table B25041

[12] 2016-2020 ACS Estimates, Table B25024

[13] 2016-2020 ACS Estimates, Table B20534

[14] Massachusetts Housing Partnership Data Town and Town Data

[15] 2016-2020 ACS Estimates, Table B25075

[16] 2016-2020 ACS Estimates, Table B25118

[17] 2016-2020 ACS Estimates, Table B25007

[18] 2016- 2020 ACS Estimates, Table B25070, Table B25091

[19] 2020 ACS Estimates, Table B17001

[20] Bankrate.com Housing Affordability Calculator; Author’s Calculations

[21] CHAS Cost Burden Data, Based on 2016-2020 ACS

[22] Kiefer, J. and L. Krentz, 2018. Water Use in the Multi-Family Housing Sector. Water Research Foundation

GEORGETOWN, MA

TOWN OF GEORGETOWN FORMERLY NEW ROWLEY 1639 1838 INCORPORATED MASSACHUSETTS

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

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